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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. Iran
- [1](#)3. PM Olmert's Performance

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Key stories in the media:  
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Yediot, Israel Radio, and other leading media quoted State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack as saying in his daily briefing on Monday that he would not expect Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to travel to Israel and the Palestinian territories on her upcoming trip next week as planned. McCormack mentioned the political situation in Israel. Israel Radio quoted senior GOI sources as saying that they were surprised by the cancellation of Secretary Rice's visit. The radio quoted one senior Israeli source

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in Jerusalem as saying that the cancellation is "unprecedented" and that people in the region might interpret the cancellation as evidence that, because of the situation in Israel, the US administration does not believe that the diplomatic process can be moved forward. Israel Radio cited the belief of another GOI source that Secretary Rice's visit was postponed by a few weeks.

IDF Radio quoted Dov Weisglass, who was former PM Ariel Sharon's top advisor, as saying that Rice "has come to the conclusion that in the current situation, the government's ability to make decisions of significance is limited. She certainly does not want to waste her time and to create or to draw gratuitous attention. Danny Ayalon, formerly Israel's ambassador to the United States, told IDF Radio that Secretary Rice's "disappointment is mainly with the Palestinians. But, of course, the lack of political clarity here does not contribute to the matter.

Ha'aretz reported that PM Ehud Olmert is conducting secret talks with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas. The newspaper wrote that Olmert, in conversations with ministers and other political figures recently, has hinted that he and Abbas have been holding talks, but did not reveal the content or venue of the talks, or the level of those involved. According to Ha'aretz, the people Olmert spoke to say he expects significant political progress this summer. The secret talks appear to be about state affairs, rather than confidence building measures such as removing roadblocks and opening passages.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Monday Olmert intimated to visiting German FM Frank-Walter Steinmeier that Israel would take widespread military action in the Gaza Strip if a Qassam rocket kills Israelis. Ha'aretz reported that the IDF's OC Southern Command, Maj. Gen. Yoav Galant, recently presented a contingency plan to the cabinet to counter the firing of Qassam rockets at Israel from the Gaza Strip and thwart Palestinian efforts to consolidate military power there. Palestinian militants have launched a number of rockets into Israel recently, one of them hitting a house in Sderot. The media reported that the IDF responded by striking a vehicle that Islamic Jihad used for firing rockets, wounding three militants. According to Ha'aretz, the blueprint presented to the cabinet discusses engaging hostile forces near the security fence surrounding the Strip and employing remote-controlled weapons systems, rather than a ground operation to purge the cities and refugee camps in and around Gaza of militants. Galant reportedly listed five components for the plan: 1. Creating a buffer zone on the Palestinian side of the fence separating the Gaza Strip from Israel. 2. An escalation of retaliatory actions following the firing of Qassam rockets to render launching the rockets into Israel counterproductive by extracting a steep price from the Palestinians. 3. The renewal of aerial assassinations of high-ranking terrorists as well as Palestinians responsible for firing Qassam rockets and arms smuggling. 4. Developing improved technology for detecting and destroying tunnels employed for arms smuggling. 5. Reinforcing intelligence capabilities. Ha'aretz said that PM Olmert did not approve the IDF's proposals. He only agreed to authorize a small expansion of the area within the Strip in which the IDF is allowed to operate. In addition, Olmert will convene the security cabinet next week for a hearing concerning the amassing of military power by the Palestinian organizations in Gaza, and the IDF's plans to counter it. Ha'aretz quoted political sources as saying that the discussion was necessary because the cabinet might be asked to authorize action in Gaza "at any given moment." For that purpose, the sources were quoted as saying, the ministers must be briefed in advance on the material. Yet senior officials in the defense establishment believe that extensive action in the Gaza Strip is unavoidable. Ha'aretz cited the US administration's hope that the actions of Palestinian security forces loyal to Abbas to foil terrorist activity could help avoid

this scenario.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Austrian Maj. Gen. Wolfgang Jilke, commander of the UN force deployed along the Israeli-Syrian border, told the newspaper that , while Syria is repairing its military positions along the border with Israel, its army has not beefed up its forces on the Golan Heights. Jilke, commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) responsible for maintaining the cease-fire on the border, dismissed Israeli claims of an unprecedented military buildup within Syria. The Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli defense officials rejected Jilke's assessment. All media reported that on Monday the head of Israel's National Security Council, Ilan Mizrahi, told the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that Syria's move to restart the peace process was authentic. "It is not clear whether they want peace or whether they just want the peace process," he was quoted as saying. "They are still figuring out how it will best serve them, but the call for peace talks themselves is authentic." Maariv reported that a few days ago Farid Razeri (sp.), a Syrian exile in Paris, who is a strident opponent of Bashar Assad's regime, published a very pro-Israel article on the Internet. Maariv reported that Razeri confirmed his views in an interview to the newspaper,

Maariv reported that the Foreign Ministry has been working stealthily on an "international campaign against Iran," which is to be waged by Israeli diplomats across the world in keeping with a list of tasks and detailed instructions that will be received from Jerusalem. The campaign is currently in the final stages of preparation. The person behind the idea and its execution is Aharon Abramovitch, the Director General of the Foreign Ministry, who received FM Tzipi Livni's approval. The planned campaign was inspired by the international campaign that Israel waged against Hizbullah, which was declared a resounding success and resulted in Hizbullah being defined as a terrorist organization in many countries and by the European Union.

Ha'aretz quoted an Olmert associate as saying on Monday that if the Labor Party pulls out of the coalition after the May 28 party primaries, Kadima will ask Likud to join if it agrees to an election date, which will apparently be set for the end of 2008. The comment came as Olmert and his aides begin preparing for the possibility of a Labor withdrawal. All media reported that on Monday the coalition survived three no-confidence votes, with some Kadima and Labor Knesset members abstaining or absenting themselves from the votes. Ha'aretz reported that former PM Ehud Barak is contemplating joining Olmert's cabinet. Ha'aretz reported that an internal survey among Labor members carried out by Barak's staff indicated that the party's members want to remain in the coalition. Ha'aretz quoted senior Kadima members as saying that Olmert is weighing naming Construction and Housing Minister Meir Sheetrit (Kadima) finance minister.

Ha'aretz reported that FM Livni will head to Cairo on Thursday to meet with Egyptian and Jordanian leaders, who are interested in "marketing" the Arab peace initiative to Israel. During her visit, Livni is expected to meet with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Media reported on Livni's talks with German FM Steinmeier. Livni mentioned the Qassam rocket attacks against Israel and Steinmeier was quoted as saying that Germany will do everything it can to advance the diplomatic process and minimize the scope of violence in the region. The Jerusalem Post reported that PM Olmert stressed Saudi Arabia's positive role to Steinmeier.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Abbas has failed to persuade Hamas and most Palestinian factions to accept the latest US plan for easing restrictions and improving security for Israel. The newspaper wrote that the "benchmark" plan has also been rejected by some of Abbas's top aides and political allies. The Jerusalem Post reported that on Sunday Abbas praised the US plan.

Yediot reported that Olmert will meet with Jordan's King Abdullah II in Petra next week.

Maariv reported that, six years after the closure of the Moroccan representation in Israel, Morocco's King Mohamed VI recently appointed an unofficial ambassador to Israel -- Serge Berdugo, the head of Morocco's Jewish community and a former tourism minister of that country. Maariv also reported on growing Jewish and Israeli pilgrimages and tourist visits to Tunisia.

Yediot and The Jerusalem Post quoted French president-elect Nicolas Sarkozy as saying on Monday, in a phone conversation with PM Olmert, that he is a friend of Israel, which can rely on his friendship. The Jerusalem Post reported that French Ambassador to Israel Jean-Michel Casa told the newspaper on Monday that, with Sarkozy's election, "there will be new progress and new steps forward in French-Israeli relations." The Jerusalem Post cited the French Foreign Ministry as saying that Sarkozy received a higher percentage of votes from French citizens in Israel than from expatriates in any other country. The French ministry said that 90.7 percent of French citizens living in Israel outside of Jerusalem voted for Sarkozy, significantly higher than the 53 percent of the votes he garnered in France. The Jerusalem Post noted that 71.5 percent of the French voting in Lebanon voted for Sarkozy, an indication that just as Israelis view him as pro-Israeli, French Lebanese seem to view him as pro-Lebanese. (In the US, Sarkozy won just under 64 percent of absentee ballots.)

All media reported that on Monday the Hebrew University of Jerusalem announced that the grave and tomb of Herod the Great, the Roman-appointed king of Judea (37Q4 BCE), have been discovered at the fortress Herodian (or Herodium) in the Judean desert.

All media reported on the recrudescence of anti-Semitic attacks in Russia and Ukraine over the past two weeks.

All media (banner in Yediot) reported that on Monday the rate of the US dollar dropped to its lowest point in seven years: 3.998 shekels. Leading economic commentators called to detach common dollar-linked payments, such as real estate prices, from the US currency.

Ha'aretz presented the results of Tel Aviv University's Peace Index poll conducted among Israelis on April 30 and May 1:

- The number of those in the Jewish public who now justify the Second Lebanon War is in fact lower than last summer, but a clear majority of 57 percent still define the war as justified (38 percent consider it to have been unjustified and the rest have no clear opinion).
- A small majority (52.5 percent) believes the main faults identified in the Winograd report will be addressed, whereas 38 percent do not think so. However, the gap between those who think the report exposed all the main problems (46 percent) and those who believe it failed to address significant issues (38 percent) is not large. According to the survey organizers, this indicates a not inconsiderable degree of suspicion toward a commission appointed by the PM -- a suspicion apparently rooted in the profound distrust of the establishment and of the political leadership. Some 68 percent also believe that if those responsible do not resign willingly, there will be a wave of civil protest demanding their resignation. Furthermore, 38 percent -- an extremely high rate considering that it is usually a minority that participates in protests of this kind -- say they will take part in such a protest if it erupts (58 percent say they will not participate).

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1. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Former Israeli Ambassador to the UN and conservative contributor Dr. Dore Gold wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Like Israel, Saudi Arabia wants to curb the Iranian takeover of the region, but it is not prepared to strengthen moderate Palestinian elements at the expense of Hamas or to reach an open dialogue with Israel."

Military correspondent Amir Rappaport wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Israel has the moral obligation to make sure that every one of its citizens knows that its leaders did their utmost to prevent [war with Syria]."

Military correspondent Yaakov Katz wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The growing consensus in the defense establishment is that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will be extremely careful and hesitant before sending Israel back to war

[with Syria]."

#### Block Quotes:

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#### II. "Was There an Initiative?"

Former Israeli Ambassador to the UN and conservative contributor Dr. Dore Gold wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (5/8): "It may be assumed that the Olmert government, which is under heavy domestic pressure, will find a way to revive the diplomatic process -- among other reasons: to create a political agenda. The search for a diplomatic initiative is legitimate, provided it is based on a proper reading of the regional reality... [Saudi King Abdullah] has recently declined to meet with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki, thus again slapping in the face of the US administration, because Al-Maliki is considered a pro-American leader..... One must ask the question about how the United States can lead a diplomatic move between Israel and Saudi Arabia when Riyadh-Washington relations are so fragile. Furthermore, it is astounding to see how [Condoleezza] Rice has represented a Saudi stance that is open to negotiations with Israel, when the Saudi King has made strong anti-Western statements.... Indeed, like Israel, Saudi Arabia wants to curb the Iranian takeover of the region, but

it is not prepared to strengthen moderate Palestinian elements at the expense of Hamas or to reach an open dialogue with Israel. Thus, the hope that the Saudi initiative could be adopted might fizzle."

#### II. "Yes, Talk with the Syrians"

Military correspondent Amir Rappaport wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (5/8): "The answer to the dilemma of whether to respond affirmatively to the Syrian call for peace negotiations is simple..... Even prior to statements made [on Monday by the head of Israel's National Security Council, Ilan] Mizrahi, the balance of calculations was already in favor of holding negotiations. And the reason is not necessarily because there are high chances of achieving a peace agreement with Syria. On the contrary, [Mossad Director Meir] Dagan is probably right and Assad is interested in negotiations for the sake of the talks only and not for reaching an agreement. What counts is the damage: if we hold negotiations with Syria that do not lead anywhere, in other words, what is most likely to happen is that we will be back at the same point we are today, that is not as terrible as willingly passing on negotiations that have even the smallest chance of success, and then we reach going to war. Furthermore, if Israel is fated to fight another war with Syria, Israel has the moral obligation to make sure that every one of its citizens knows that its leaders did their utmost to prevent it."

#### III. "Assessing Syria's True Intentions a Tricky Task"

Military correspondent Yaakov Katz wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (5/8): "In Israel, there is a real concern about the prospects of war with Syria. Defense officials are predicting that should another round with Hizbullah erupt, it would not remain isolated to Lebanon. And unlike last summer when it watched from the sidelines, Damascus will be forced to join the fray,... The growing consensus in the defense establishment is that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will be extremely careful and hesitant before sending Israel back to war. While the Knesset announcement [made on Monday by the head of Israel's National Security Council, Ilan] Mizrahi, could be per Olmert's bidding as part of an effort to lay the ground for a new diplomatic initiative vis a vis the Syrians, it may also be an attempt on Mizrahi's part to prevent war and to urge his boss to answer the Syrian overtures."

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#### I2. Iran:

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## Summary:

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The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "If France championed draconian sanctions against Iran, it could almost single-handedly lead Europe in avoiding both the need for Western military action against Tehran."

## Block Quotes:

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### "Sarkozy's Opportunity"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (5/8): "The great majority of French Jews and French-Israeli dual citizens voted for the victor in Sunday's presidential runoff, Nicolas Sarkozy. It is not just the Jewish people, however, who should be encouraged by the results and wishing the president-elect every success, but the citizens of France and of all free nations.... The notion of the last few decades that France advanced its own interests by almost reflexively opposing the US and siding with the Arab world against Israel has not done well for France or for the world. It was a conceit more than a rational policy. Certainly, in today's world, it has shifted from being merely indulgent to posing real dangers for international security. Today, the Free World is facing a threat from Islamo-fascist regimes and their terrorist allies that demands solidarity among nations that are under attack. Sarkozy himself has said that an Iranian nuclear weapon is unacceptable, and that sanctions must be tightened.... France knows better than most nations the price of not standing up to aggressive tyrants in time. If France championed draconian sanctions against Iran, it could almost single-handedly lead Europe in avoiding both the need for Western military action against Tehran, and the threat of living under a growing nuclear and terrorist shadow. There is no better way to restore French leadership and pride."

## 13. PM Olmert's Performance:

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## Summary:

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### "The Danger Inherent in Closing One's Eyes"

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "[The Israeli Left] does not care about the government having failed; about the fact that it went to a rational war but eroded Israel's deterrence because of its blinking policy."

## Block Quotes:

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### "The Danger in Closing One's Eyes"

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (5/8): "[The Israeli Left] does not care about the government having failed; about the fact that it went to a rational war but eroded Israel's deterrence because of its blinking policy: neither war nor peace, neither invasion nor restraint.... Neither does it care about how much corruption is piling up under the regime's desk.... The person who understood the significance of corruption in the collapse of the government is Arie Eldad of National Union [a far-Right opposition party]. Speaking in Tel Aviv a week ago, the Professor and Knesset Member said that he had learned some lessons. He is unwilling to accept from a corrupt government even a decision to establish new settlements in Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank], which he so fervently longs for."

JONES